

**you are my
sweetest downfall**

drippingcandie

you are my sweetest downfall by drippingcandie

Category: IT (2017)

Genre: Growing up!, Implied/Referenced Self-Harm, Internalized Homophobia, It Gets Worse Before It Gets Better, M/M, Mental Health Issues, Mild Language, Not Actually Unrequited Love, POV Third Person, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, So he gets more developed than Bill but there will be Bill development later, Stan's Point of View, The clown existed i'm sorry :(, reposted

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

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Summary:

it's the summer.

(or, bill and stanley grow even after pennywise. surprisingly.)

REPOSTED AS CHAPTERED FIC/HIATUS

1. beneath the stars came falling on our heads;

Author's Note:

This piece was posted as a series but looking back, it makes more sense to have it as a chaptered fic! Although, it will be slow to update.

Summary for the Chapter:

“st-sta-stay.” it’s like whatever was constricting his chest was gone and relief flooded Bill’s face. “stay.” he said more firmly. “u-up here w-with you.”

“you don’t have to do that.” stan looked over at bill, watched as he smoothed out his hair. “bev is having fun.”

“bev ca-can have fun without me, stanley.”

(or, it's the summer of 1990 and stanley never forgets, no he never forgets.)

Notes for the Chapter:

OKAY BEFORE I GET TO THE NOTES:
PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS DEALS WITH STANLEY'S MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES. there is implied self harm (not graphic or too descriptive) and he mentions wanting to die (although it's more of a "in the future" type thing, not right at that instant). if you are triggered by either of those things, while they are not descriptive, this may not be the fic for you. that being said, lets continue with some more notes:

1. I love these guys, I really do. So to show my love I'm writing them an angsty little mini series. this is just the beginning. I plan to have 3 more installments (maybe more).

2. I didn't mean to make Bev out to be a villain. it's just the way stanley sees her in this scenario. i truly love her.

3. i see a lot of myself in stan and because of that, i believe he doesn't let things go. that's just me projecting, but the grudges he holds stem from that. also, i've started reading the book and even as an adult, stanley knows there's something /wrong/, so i feel like he wouldn't forget as easily as the others.

4. i wanna punch billy in the face i hope he gets his act together

5. title is from Samson by Regina Spektor...that's their song i don't make the rules

“What’s up with Stuttering Buh-Buh-Bill?” Richie leans towards Stan, breath smelling like cigarettes and the applesauce that Eddie had brought him that day.

Stan wordlessly shoots him a glare. He knows what’s up with Bill. Plus, he’s terrible at whispering. He can see the way that Bill’s shoulders tense up when Richie speaks about him, sees how much he wishes he could be okay. Stan wishes the same.

It’s the summer after the Summer of All Bad Things. That’s what Stan refers to the two months of sheer terror and tragedy when he’s having trouble coming to terms with things. Bill had started calling it that too, only when he talked to Stanley. He knows why. It’s because Bill knows he’s weak. Bill knows he can’t deal with the memories as well as the others can. The others...well, sometimes they have trouble recalling things.

It floats around in Stan’s memory in blinding color. He can recall every second and how it felt like years. He can’t seem to let it go like

the others can. Can't let go, can't let go, can't let-

"He was really excited for Bev to come down this summer." Eddie whispers, a little more discreetly than his boyfriend had. Bill, still sitting on the log only a few feet away, seems to recoil from nothing. Stan tells himself it's spider, or a really big bug. Or poison ivy. Richie's voice rings in his head. *Not every fucking plant is poison ivy, Stanley.*

And, oh. Bev. Yeah, she was supposed to make the two hour drive back to Derry this summer. Had sent Bill a postcard, which he showed the group proudly. It had been signed with three hearts and Stan's stomach flipped at the way Bill's face glowed.

But she wasn't coming. Bill had been crushed.

Stan is mad at her, obviously. She shouldn't have gotten his best friend's hopes up like that. It had been all he talked about for weeks. He talked about it so much that Stan didn't even want to initiate conversation with him. It always came back to *What are we going to do at the clubhouse? Do you think she'll still wanna go swimming? are there any good movies playing at the Aladdin?*

"So he's moping because he's not going to get his dick wet?" Richie snorts.

"Shut the fuck up, Richie." Stan snaps with some animosity that he's never heard from himself before, feeling the gravel beneath him dig into his palms. "Have some decency for once! Just once!" He squeezes his eyes shut, tension building up in his shoulders. Oh god,

he wished he had the balls to just sock Richie Tozier right in the mouth.

It was quiet for a moment. Stan opens his eyes.

Richie is sitting there, mouth agape, eyes impossibly wide behind his coke bottle lenses. Eddie's lips are pressed in a tight line, little etches of sorrow and worry around his brow. Even Ben had looked up from his most recent read that he obtained from the library.

"Decent enough for your mother." Richie doesn't go for a high five like he normally would. He looks almost feral, like he would be winding up for a punch aimed at Stan's jaw. He wouldn't hit him, he knew he wouldn't. But it feels that way. Like they're at a standoff.

"Beep beep, Richie." Ben steps in before Stan can even get another word out. Thank god. Thank god and the heavens and the earth for sweet Ben Hanscom.

He steals one quick glance at Bill, who's no longer staring at his sneakers. He's looking at Stan, a little shocked, but not tensed up. Not looking like a kicked animal anymore. Stan feels a weight lift off his chest that he didn't even know was there.

Richie is gathering his plethora of prized possessions, which any normal person would call junk, off the ground now to shove into Eddie's backpack. Some rubberbands, a small rubber lizard that he won one day at the arcade, some kind of chain made out of old gum wrappers.

Stan can hear him muttering, although he can only pick out a few words. *Bitchy*. Notable definitely. What catches Stan off guard is when Richie says *jealous*. Only he and Eddie are close enough to hear, so he doesn't draw any attention to it.

“I'll see you assholes when Stan the Man gets off his damn period.” He gets up without even consulting Eddie, who turns to them with an expression full of regret.

“I'm so sorry.” Eddie mouths, picking up his backpack. Short little legs stumble after Richie's much taller ones, poor little guy still hadn't hit his growth spurt, up the uneven greenery and rocks to go back to their bikes.

Stan feels a little bit of guilt eat up at him, just a little bit, as he watches two of his best friends flee. Escaping the wrath of Stanley Uris. The wrath that hadn't been there a year ago. The animosity that festered inside of him.

“Tuh-Thu-Thanks, Stan.” Bill says hoarsely from his place on the log.

Stan gives a bittersweet smile. “What are friends for?” He says tightly, grabbing his own bag. He can feel the sweat begin to stick to his once crisp and clean button up. Can feel how uncomfortable his khaki shorts are getting. “I have to get going.”

“Are you sure?” Bill looks at him as if he doesn't know what he wants. Stanley always knows what he wants. Like how he knew he

didn't want to go in that house. Bill made him go.

Stanley shakes the thought for the sake of self preservation. "My dad will be expecting me anyway. It's Friday."

Bill gives him a curious look.

"For prayer, Bill. You two have fun." Stan tries not to sound bitter, but he feels as if he's failing. *Yes, have fun moaning and groaning about how your true love isn't returning home for summer.* The thought was intrusive and mean and not Stanley, but he takes a deep breath anyway.

At least Ben, unlike Stanley, still has something in common with Bill.

When he returns to the quarry next week, Stan feels utterly betrayed.

There, sitting in his spot, is noone other than Beverley Marsh hanging off of Bill Denbrough's shoulder. She's wearing those powder blue denim overalls that Bill always raves about with that 'cute flower printed top, y'know the one that just barely covers that one freckle on her shoulder'. And no. He didn't know. He didn't even know Beverley had a damn freckle on her shoulder.

He finds a new spot, one across from the pair, and watches absent mindedly as Bev pushes red curls behind her ears. Watches her

slightly bump shoulders with Bill. He looks over to Ben, who gives him a sad look. Why? Shouldn't it be the other way around? Ben was the one in love. Ben was the one that should be jealous. Jealous of Bill.

“Stan!” She had yelled, staying in her spot. She knew that Stan could only tolerate being touched by few. The list being only three people long.

It's not that Stanley hated Beverly.

Stanley Uris didn't hate Beverly.

Stan hated the way that she unintentionally captured everyone's attention. Stan hated the way that Bill would do anything for her. How Bill had dragged him into the sewers just to save her. He could've gone home, he could've gone home, he could've turned around and gone-

“Stan?” She repeats again. This time more worried. He snaps back.
“How've you been?”

Bad. Terrible. Thanks for dragging your ass back to Derry to fucking haunt me with these good for nothing memories. We should've left you in the damn sewers. If It was going to take one, why didn't it take you? Why did it want B-

“Stan?” This time it's Bill chiming in. His chest tightens.

“I’ve been fine.” He says curtly. He looks down at his shirt, which had become slightly rumpled on the bike ride over. He untucks it, tucks it in, clicks his tongue, then repeats.

“Are you sure, Stan?” She says sweetly. It doesn’t remind him of that summer, for once he is like everyone else. Nothing was sweet that summer.

Beverly is sweet. Stan can’t hate Beverly.

But oh, he can. It’s not her fault. She is his friend. They’re all friends here, but Bev is different. Bev is a girl, if he were to be stating the obvious. And they were boys. Boys liked girls, right? That’s right. Ben liked Bev. Bill liked Bev. Richie’s goddamn voice is in his ears again. *Bill had her back in the third grade.*

Stan thought he had Bill in third grade. Bill had been his best friend. They had been inseparable. But no, memory didn’t serve him correctly. Bill had Bev in the third grade. Even if it was just for one measly kiss. It would always be more than what Stan had. Because Stan was supposed to marry a sweet Jewish girl. Not some secular boy from Derry.

“Stu-Stan? A-are you o-oh-oh-”

“I’m okay.” He says, voice softening to save his friend from choking on his own words. He imagines the letters, happy animated little things, clawing their way up Bill’s throat. Sometimes, when it would

get really bad, Bill's hands would fly to his own throat and he would actually choke on his own spit. Not little animated letters, but the effect was the same.

Like when Stan got a bad cough in the winter and he coughed so much that nothing came up but blood. God, blood. Blood everywhere. The woman with the flute and his friends leaving him, Bill leaving him.

“Wanna light, Bev?” Richie shouts, rifling through Eddie’s fanny pack. Stan wrinkles his nose, the thought of smoke filling his lungs. He glances at Bill through his lashes, who doesn’t seem to be bothered by just another obstacle in his throat. Add toxins to the clawing words. Maybe they were like bees and buzzed right to the surface when adding smoke to the equation.

Bev takes her cigarette between spindly fingers, taking a long drag. Bill doesn’t shy away.

“Now we’re even. Fuck. Finally.” Richie settles into his spot behind Eddie, who practically sits on his lap. “No more holding that against me, Marsh.”

“You owed me?” She smiles that minx like smile of hers. Richie groans in response.

“It’s not like you needed the whole pack anyway, Rich.” Eddie grumbles, readjusting himself in Richie’s grasp. Witnessing the protective hold over each other, Stan suddenly feels loneliness pit in his gut.

“Just don’t blow any of that over here. Librarian will have a coronary.” Ben flips his page and Mike is looking over his shoulder.

Stan looks around at all of their faces. Looks at how they’re all shoulder to shoulder. So close, human contact. He doesn’t remember the last time he let anyone touch him like that, even if it was just laying a hand on his shoulder.

Alone. He thought bitterly.

This is how it was meant to be. His friends had each other, but they left him behind in the dust. Separated. Distance.

It makes the heart grow fonder.

“Who wants to take a dip?” Richie shouted, pulling his ugly hawaiian shirt off of his shoulders.

“Wait up!” Mike is shucking off his jeans that have holes in the knees and are lightly dusted with a fine layer of dirt. Ben is a few steps behind him due to the fact that he was pretty diligent about marking his place in whatever damn book he was reading now. Stan used to keep up, but nothing his friends did really interested him anymore.

“I don’t want to touch the bottom!” Eddie yelled from his place on the shore. Stan thinks back to last summer when Eddie took his first jump, his first moment of bravery.

“Aw,” Richie coos, wading back up to him. “Climb on my back. I’ll be your knight in shining armor!” He sings and Eddie begrudgingly hops on Richie’s back, legs wrapping around and hooking around Richie’s middle.

Bev is pulling off her tank top, which Bill had said hung off her shoulders just right. Stan is starting to think that Bill has a thing for shoulders. Bev’s are thin, narrow. There’s a slight dip where her collar bone is, which is where he assumes the damn freckle is. Nothing like Stan’s broader ones, not one freckle in sight, no shirt that sits ‘just right’ on his shoulders.

She traipses in after the other boys, legs kicking wildly in the water. She’s kind of awkward, not all graceful. It was charming, in a newborn baby giraffe kind of way.

Stan sits on the gravel, nothing new. It’s his spot now. He didn’t need a rock, log, or tree stump to sit on. He was fine by himself on the ground. Oh, how he wish he enjoyed playing in the water like he used to. When it touched his skin it reminded him of the floating heads, turning and tumbling in grey water. He felt sick to his stomach.

“Huh-hey, Stan.” Bill isn’t taking off his shirt or shorts like the others. Instead he sits down in the gravel, right next to Stan. Shoulder to shoulder. “Wh-wa-why aren’t y-you swu-swim-swimming?”

Stan smiled, always the most patient when Bill spoke. Never called him Stuttering Bill, never told him to spit it out. Bill never told him he was grateful. He didn't have to. That's just what friends did.

“Stan?”

“Oh.” He realizes that Bill is asking him a question. He doesn't want to answer. “Ju-just didn't feel like it today.”

“You haven't sa-suh-su-wam all summer.” Bill tumbles over the w's under the hot July heat. Always has, Stan doesn't want to say always will. He thinks of the mantra that Bill repeats. *He thrusts his first against the posts and still insists he sees the ghost.* No w's.

Stan thinks back to the question Bill asked. He hasn't swam all summer. Was that true? That couldn't be right. He remembers the fresh water hitting his skin.. *I've swam plenty this summer.*

“Nuh-uh.” Bill shakes his head and Stan honestly didn't even register that those words had come out of his mouth. “No-Not once, I wo-would remember.” The w's. Stan wishes the damn letter didn't exist.

He wishes a lot of things didn't exist. Like the real reason he wasn't swimming. He thinks of his legs under his khaki shorts, the thin lines that go up and down. They are neat, symmetrical on each side. Only in even numbers. The thought passes quickly.

“I-I'm going to st-st-st...” Stanley can see that Bill is wracking his

brain for the word. The word, that would come so easily if it was left to pen and paper, didn't want to be heard apparently. Stan had seen Bill's writing. To have all that in you and not be able to say it, the thought wounded him. "Shit." He eventually sighs.

"Start heading out there?" Stan says, hands folded in his lap as he looks out at the water. Bill shakes his head and lets out a frustrated whine.

"St-sta-stay." It's like whatever was constricting his chest was gone and relief flooded Bill's face. "Stay." He said more firmly. "U-up here w-with you."

"You don't have to do that." Stan looked over at Bill, watched as he smoothed out his hair. "Bev is having fun."

"Bev ca-can have fun without me, Stanley."

He guesses that Bill has a point, although he's not sure if it's true. He's never seen a moment where Beverly Marsh is smiling and Bill isn't there. Bill is always there, like some ghost that follows her around. *He thrusts his fist against the post and still insists he sees the ghost.* He is the ghost, Stan thinks bitterly. Bill is Bev's ghost, and Stan is Bill's.

"Wh-what kind of bird is that?" Bill says, pointing to a gray bird with blood red patches on the breast. Blood, when the clown turned around and sliced open poor Ben's stomach. Oh, how Richie had told him that he was leaking hamburger helper. Stan hadn't been able to eat it since.

“Do y-you know?” Bill asks again.

“It’s a common redpoll.” He says, as if he just had an epiphany.
“They, uh, quite like the shrubs around here.”

“Co-Cool, Stan. Cool.”

For a moment, it feels as if Stan has his best friend back.

“That movie was amazing!” Bev crowed, arm looped through Bill’s.

All seven of them flood through the front door of the Aladdin and out into the cool Derry night. It was well past dark and the stars twinkled like fairy lights above them in the inky darkness. Inky, black, and dark. The stars were a single flashlight drifting left to right in the sewers. Looking for Bev, looking for Bill.

“Fucking awesome, man.” Richie is shoving popcorn into his mouth and Eddie chastises him.

“Don’t talk with your mouth full.” The pipsqueak wrinkles his nose in disgust. That just causes Richie to get himself into more trouble by leaning in real close.

Stan is caught in between Ben and Mike, who have already began over analyzing the movie. He nods as if he is listening intently as the group wanders down the street towards the diner. Milkshakes, Bev had insisted. You couldn't end a good night without a good milkshake. She leads the way, Bill ghosting behind her.

When they get there, the normal booth that will fit all of them is taken. Anxiety rushes into Stan's lungs, his stomach. He doesn't like change. He doesn't like when things aren't the normal way. He doesn't like how easily everyone slides into a circular booth meant for five.

Richie slides in first to sit in the middle, Eddie going to practically sit on his lap like always. Mike slides in on the right, while Bill slides in on the left. Next to him, Bev slides in to sit on the edge. Ben easily pulls up a chair to sit at the last spot available.

More anxiety rises to the surfaces and he tries not to whine.

"Just pull up a chair, Stan." Mike says, voice warm. Mike has always been so kind. Mike would never purposely put him in this situation. That is what Stan tells himself to relieve the tension in his chest. But then he thinks about pulling up a chair. He looks at the tables around them, all occupied. There are empty chairs, of course. He just doesn't want a dirty look.

How would the chair even fit at the table? It wouldn't. He'd just be in everyone's way. He'd be right in the flow of traffic. The waitress could trip over him or someone would have to get out and they would all have to rearrange themselves. Then Richie would make a

comment about how Stan is always in the way and-

“Stan?” Ben says, turned around in his seat to face him.

He looks back and forth, assessing his options. Behind Mike and Richie there is a small two person booth. Then he could turn around and be able to see Ben and....Bill and Bev. Another two person booth sat behind the couple. That seemed like a safer option.

“I’ll just sit here.” He said tightly, quickly sliding into the lonely booth.

“No, Stan-

“I’ll sit here!” He says again, pulling at his collar. Mike seems to give Ben some kind of warning look, as if not to push.

The rest of the gang laughs on when the waitress comes around to take their order. He knows Bill orders vanilla because it’s the easiest to say. If Stan was sitting next to him, he’d make sure that the boy had gotten strawberry, his actual favorite. Beverly didn’t amend his order, or ask if he wanted anything else.

Stan orders a water.

The waitress gives him a sad smile but doesn’t comment on how he is not sitting with his friends. They are so close, he can hear them

through the little dividers between the booths. He can see Ben, who is only sitting a few feet away from them. It's not the loneliest he has ever felt.

He's twirling the straw wrapper around his finger when he hears Bev say she'll be right back. She easily slips out of the booth and slides right into the seat across from Stan. No one comments on it, not even Richie.

“Hey, Bev.” He mumurs, beginning to tear the wrapper into small pieces.

She leans forward, dangerously close to his ear. Not intimidating for the normal bear, but to him? It felt like she was about to reach into his chest and rip his fucking heart out.

“I know you like him.” She whispers, as if to not let the others know.
“And it’s okay you know.”

Stan tenses and goes on the defensive. “What are you- what do you- I don’t-” He’s flustered. He doesn’t know what to do. He only has a few secrets, and he wouldn’t say liking Bill was one of them. He’d say missing Bill is.

“It’s fun, y’know. But I just realized that.”

“I do-don’t-” Bev gives him a look as if to say to be quiet. It felt like he was underwater and he could still hear his friends in the booth

over being rowdy. “I don’t like boys.” He said numbly.

“I like girls. And boys.” She said matter of factly. “It’s okay to like both, or neither, or just one or the other. And he’s all yours after I leave okay?”

He wants to ask why after she leaves? Why not now? Has she been leading Bill on this whole entire time? That wasn’t fair to him at all. That wasn’t fair to Bill, who looked at Bev like she put the fucking stars in the sky.

“I’ve been meaning to do it, but what was I supposed to say? Hey, Stan is so obviously in love with you, so this isn’t going to work? Yeah, don’t think that would’ve flown.” She tucks a red curl behind her ear and her green eyes sparkle.

“I can’t-I just can’t do that.” He whispers harshly. “I don’t love him and he doesn’t love me and it’s not going to happen.”

“We’ll see about that, Uris.” She gets up from the booth and is gone as quickly as she came.

He leaves his water and shredded wrapper behind.

He leaves his friends behind.

It's two days later when Stan finds Bill crying.

The boy is sitting in Stan's spot. Alone in the gravel. At first, Stan doesn't understand what's the matter. Then he remembers the goodbyes from the morning. How Bev had hugged all of them one by one and then asked Bill to speak privately. Stan had left before the aftermath.

And here Bill was in the same spot, hours later. The others leaving him behind in the dust. Like the dust on Mike's jeans or the dust that covered Mr. Uris's office.

Bill is an ugly crier. Stan normally wouldn't be so harsh, but if he was going to be honest, it was true. Bill blubbered, trying to get out words or anguish or something that Stan couldn't quite figured out. If Bill wasn't sitting upright, Stan would think he's dying.

Wordlessly, he finds his footing and makes his way down the incline to the gravel. It's as if there's some understanding between them as Stan sits down next to him. It's minutes before either of them say anything.

"She is-isn't cuh-com-coming back, S-Stan." Bill says, his blubbering taking a back seat. *St-Stan. St-still insists he sees the ghost.*

"She will." Stan says. God, he wants to comfort Bill. He wants to wrap his arms around his best friend and say everything will be

alright, Bev will come back. In twenty six years, Bev will come back and fall in love with Bill all over again while they're fighting that awful demon clown.

Stan hopes some wicked illness takes him by then, or he gets in a car crash, or has a heart attack. Anything to not have to witness them falling in love again.

“I know.” Bill says, no stutter. They had sworn it in blood. As if remembering, Bill grabs tightly onto Stan’s hand, squeezing his fingers. “Yo-you won’t leave, r-right?” It’s almost a whisper and Stan has to strain to hear it.

“I would never.” He says solemnly.

Bill looks away from the water for a moment just to look at Stan. His hair is not longer parted cleanly, due to the wind. His eyes are red rimmed, his blue shirt tear stained from where he used it as a tissue. Eddie would be having a coronary. Stan isn’t Eddie.

“I don’t thi-think I cuh-co-could do this without you.” Bill doesn’t trip over his w’s.

Stan thinks that he has an iron grip on Bill’s hand now, wrapping his arm tightly around his best friend. He doesn’t care about the tears or spit. Doesn’t care that Bill is shaking like a leaf in the wind.

“I would have never been able to do it without you either.” Stan said.

Even if he didn't want to. Even if he could've ran home, even if he could've kept lying, saying it wasn't real.

"I wouldn't want to." He whispers into Bill's temple.

It was a hot August day. They had twenty six more years.

"I never want to do it without you, Bill."

2. but they're just old light

Summary for the Chapter:

“wh-what are you doing? here?” bill gets out, wrapping his hand loosely around stan’s wrist to lead him up stairs. he can only imagine how loud his mother will yell at him later when she sees the dirty footprints on the carpet.

“you don’t like it when it rains.” stan repeats hollowly.

“yeah, yeah, stan. but why? you duh-didn’t put on shoes.”

(or it’s the summer of 1991 and bill let’s stanley borrow his clothes, which he keeps.)

Notes for the Chapter:

AAAAAAAAAAAND we’re back.

1.) Implied and referenced self harm! Not graphic but be warned.

2.) Bill’s perspective is a little less fucked up than Stan’s. but he still suffers from some issues. hopefully you like seeing things his way!

3.) title comes from good ole samson again

“Stan the man, is that a pen stain on your shirt?”

Richie Tozier is leaning dramatically forward, adjusting his glasses as if they ever had shot at not being crooked. The glaringly large pen spot on Stan’s shirt pocket was practically yelling *Notice me, notice me!*

Bill knows that Stan hadn't seen it. Knows that Stan would have never walked out of the house if he knew there was a pen stain on his shirt, not knowing his mother had accidentally put one in with his laundry. Stan never wore anything but crisp, clean button ups and equally crisp, clean khaki shorts.

"St-stop it, Richie." He curses himself. He is cursed. With this damn stutter that won't leave him alone. His issue with w's have disappeared, but the harsh st sound still gets him. Among the usual ones like *thru* and *go*. No going forward, no going through.

Stan is looking down at his shirt, squinting as if he doesn't believe it. Bill want's to smack Richie, he's pretty sure that they all have at one point.

"I didn't..." Stan's eyes are brimming with tears and Bill can see him try to blink them away. "I didn't bring an extra shirt." He says, almost forlornly. Like when you lose something down a sewer drain...like a paper boat. Bill finds himself shaking his head at the thought.

Everyone had mostly forgotten, he believes, but Bill doesn't think he could ever forget.

"Here," Bill says almost absently, pulling his white and blue baseball tee over his head. He folds it neatly, just like Stan had showed him how. Mrs. Denbrough was eternally grateful for Stanley Uris now that she doesn't have to fold her fifteen year old son's laundry anymore. "Just take mine. I haven't been wearing it that long."

The shirt is pushed into Stanley's hands and Bill notices how he looks like a deer in the headlights. "G-go on, I haven't been wearing it tha-that long."

"Uh," Stan looks down at the shirt, eyebrow furrowed in thought.
"Thanks. Thanks, Bill."

Being shirtless doesn't really bother him. It's summer, it's hot. They've just finished their first year of highschool, which if anything, and they drifted away from each other just a little bit. The Summer of All Things Bad had brought them closer than ever. Bill hadn't had too bad of a time, if anything, he had it better than the rest of them.

Eddie was still a little wary of germs, so a highschool was his worst nightmare. Richie just got louder the older he got and he loomed over Eddie like some sort of protector. Mike was still home schooled to everyone's dismay, and Ben had still spent most of his time in the library before moving away. Stan had...he's not sure exactly where Stan went. Or what Stan did. He seemed to always be there with Bill, remember how he gripped his hand tightly, albeit briefly, before the first day of school. The last strong presence he remembers from Stan Uris, Now he just kind of...floated.

You'll float too. You'll float too. You'll float too.

Stan didn't float. Bill wouldn't be able to function if he did. God, Stan was so much stronger than him. Could cope so much better. Their poorly constructed friend group, and him being their self proclaimed leader, was really the only reason Bill didn't cry on the daily.

Bill looks down at Stan, literally and not metaphorically, who's still clutching his shirt. He remembers when Stan and him used to be the same height, but Bill is a whole head taller than his best friend now.

“I’ll just, uh, go change then.”

Stan skitters off behind one of the shrubs, going to change. Bill looks up, remembering when they could all easily jump off the cliff that sits in the distance. Stan doesn’t swim anymore. He only pried once, last summer, when Ben had still been with them.

I ju-just don’t feel like it. That’s what Stan had said.

And when he comes back from changing, Bill notices how his cheeks become a little red. He wants to say that he looks good, in his shirt that is, but he doesn’t want to put Stan under any more scrutiny. Instead, he lets Stan reclaim his spot next to Bill, sitting shoulder to shoulder.

“My mom suh-says that hairspray gets pen out.” He says to him, just above a whisper. “You can come over later, if you want.”

He hears Richie chuff from across their sorry excuse for a circle. It’s almost a full on chuckle. Bill glances over and Richie’s eyes seem to be gleaming, and when he realizes Bill is looking at him, he winks.

Bill sort of understands what he's insinuating.

It's not that he was oblivious, he was just scared. He tells himself he just isn't over Bev, always thought back to how he was left blubbering in the quarry. For hours. Three, if his memory serves him correctly. Shame and embarrassment flood over him at just the memory. He likes girls, he thinks. He's pretty sure he likes girls. He was infatuated with Beverly.

Then he remembers who was there when she left him in the dust. It was Stan, holding onto his shoulder, tight grip on his hands. Whispering *I wouldn't want to do it without you. I wouldn't do it without you.*

"I think I'll just go home." Stan's voice cracks, like it did when they first entered the sewers. When they just thought some strange man was luring children in with candy, when they didn't know Betty Ripsom was dragged there, her shoe being left behind.

Stan picks himself off, patting Bill's shoulder before he heads off.

Bill notices how his shirt hangs off of Stan's shoulders. He remembers when they used to be the same size, but now Stan caved in on himself. Where Bill was lean and muscular, Stan was a wisp. He doesn't remember him ever looking like a ghost. *Still insists he sees the ghost.*

"Don't be expecting to get that shirt back." Richie at least waits until Stan was out of earshot. Eddie knocks him on the back of the head, but Mike is laughing along with him.

This would be the longest summer ever.

It's a week later and it's raining.

Bill isn't a huge fan of the rain. It's too quiet in his house. There's no more haunting tunes playing from the piano or the sound of Mr. Denbrough out in the garage. Just the pitter patter of the rain hitting the roof.

He doesn't like to stay in his room at his desk anymore. Instead, he has taken to sneaking down his measly watercolors to the den. It makes him feel less lonely than being up on the second floor all by himself. His set up is sparse and his mom doesn't like him painting down here, scared he'll spill the grey water all of the carpet.

Grey water. Disgusting.

And the rain continues in it's torrential downpour. Bill sets down his pencil and dips his brush in the powder blue hue of his palette. The cluttered furniture around him makes his surrounding a little cozier, a little less cold.

There's a knock at the door. Bill freezes.

It's a clean precise knock. One, two, three. Then it stops, as if the person is counting rests. Then again. One, two, three. A little more urgency this time, crescendoing.

Slowly getting up, he makes his way to the window. He couldn't even see out of it due to the weather, but still tried. Ah, foiled again. The fog from the summer rain had muddled his one chance of seeing who was at the door.

Bill makes his way down the hallway towards the heavy, wooden front door. He tries not to panic, tries not to think that a one armed Georgie will be standing there when it swings open. Tries not to think of the cool metal of a cattle gun when his hand wraps around the door knob.

“Stan!”

His voice is too loud in even his own ears, so he isn't surprised when Stan flinches. Bill looks at the other boy.

Stan looks like he's drowning in the rain. His button up shirt clings to his wet skin, his curls are plastered to his face. Bill looks down at Stan's feet. There aren't any shoes there, not even rubbers. He steals a glance over Stan's shoulder to look at the front yard. No bike. Did he walk here?

“It's raining.” Stan says dumbly, and Bill can practically hear his knees knocking together.

“What the fu-fuck, Stan.”

“It’s raining.” He says again. “You don’t like when it rains.”

Bill’s eyes trail back down to the other boy’s feet, which aren’t clean at all. There’s mud and little bits of gravel. He knows that there’s sand on the neighbor’s sidewalk and he can see it inbetween his friend’s toes. Stan doesn’t move from his spot on the front porch.

Bill would normally invite him inside politely, but instead, he grabs Stan by the shoulders and practically drags him inside.

“Wh-what are you doing? Here?” Bill gets out, wrapping his hand loosely around Stan’s wrist to lead him up stairs. He can only imagine how loud his mother will yell at him later when she sees the dirty footprints on the stairs.

“You don’t like it when it rains.” Stan repeats hollowly.

“Yeah, yeah, Stan.” Bill is scared shitless. It had been so long since Stan had an episode like this. “But why? You duh-didn’t put on shoes.”

“Because Georgie died when it was raining.” Stan answers honestly, as if that’s what he was asking. All of the air rushes out of Bill’s lungs. Fuck. Fuck. He can’t panic right now, he has to get Stan into

dry clothes so he doesn't get sick. He has to ignore the feeling of the knife being twisted in his heart, has to ignore what Stan was saying. They walk into Bill's room and he sits Stan right down on the bed.

"Why aren't you wearing shoes, Stan?" He says more clearly, trying to keep his breath under control.

"It was raining." Stan repeats, eyebrows furrowing. There's a distant look in his eyes. "You don't like the rain." His voice is small and he sounds like a child.

Bill is not exactly sure what to do. He knows Stan has...moments. Episodes. He's never been there for them. One time, when he decided to switch it up and stay the night at Stan's, he heard the Uris's arguing in the dining room on what to do about their son. Andrea's voice is clear in his mind. *There's something wrong with him, Donald!*

Stan hadn't flinched. In fact, he had just ignored his parents and gone back to explaining some sort bird thing to Bill, who was pretending to listen. So Bill can't flinch, he has to keep pushing forward.

"We should get you into some dry clothes. You didn't leave anything outside, did you?"

"You don't like it when it rains." It's like a mantra, except emptier. *He thrusts his fist against the post and still insists he sees the ghost. He thrusts his fi-*

“I’m getting you clothes.” Bill says even though it’s obvious what he’s doing, rummaging through his drawers. After pulling out some pajama pants and a plain t-shirt, he grabs Stan by the elbow and gently pulls him to the bathroom. “Here, okay? Just change and come right back out.”

He tries to close the door as he heads out, but something stops him. That something was Stan. “No.” He said plaintively, knuckles white with the strength he used to clutch the folded garments in his arms.

“You don’t want the door closed?” Bill asks curiously.

“No.”

Okay, he can do that. He turns around to leave, knowing Stan wouldn’t want him to look. Stan never changed in front of them anymore. He hadn’t seen him in anything less than shorts and a tshirt since they were thirteen.

“No.” Bill hears from behind him again. “Don’t leave.”

“Okay,” Bill thinks. What would any of his other friends do? No, maybe that was the wrong question. What would a far more calm Bill do? “I’m going to turn around.” He does so and then he hears Stan changing behind him.

The wet heavy khaki shorts and thin shirt hit the ground. Bill taps his foot. The shuffling in the bathroom goes quiet. He turns around and

peeks in, not trying to invade Stan's privacy, just to see if he is all right.

Bill has never seen Stan like this before. Yes, stripped down to his underwear like when they swam in the quarry. But not...

Scarred.

He's staring at his own reflection in the mirror, eyes a little glassed over. His clothes still lay in a wet pile on the floor and Bill reminds himself that he'll have to hang them up. That's not the most concerning part. He glances towards his friend's legs where angry marks lie. They seem so deliberate that it can't be an accident. They're clean and precise, but those aren't the scars that Stan is staring at.

No, Stan is staring in the mirror and pushing back his wet curls. The fading marks on the side of his face, the ones that haven't gone away. Bill doesn't remember how Stan got them, that part is foggy. He does remember what Stan had screamed though. *You're not my friends! You left me! You made me go into Neiboldt!*

Bill had made him go and now he was scarred. Not forever, no. Those marks would fade, but Bill fucking abandoned Stan. No, no, that's not how it happened. He wouldn't have done that. But Stan thinks he did.

"Stan?" Bill's voice echoes off of the bathroom tiles, and yeah, there he is. Standing in the bathroom with Stan.

“No.” He snatches the pajama pants off their spot on the sink when he hears Bill, going to cover his legs. Bill bites his lips.

“Juh-just....change, okay? Then I’ll guh-get you a tow-towel and we can lie down.” He watches as Stan’s shoulders relax and he goes right back to change, as if Bill had never even walked in.

Stan ends up leaving the bathroom and Bill is waiting for him with a dry towel, way softer than any towel Bill remembers using at Stan’s house. Bill leads them back to his room and climbs into his gingham sheet clad mattress, inviting Stan to climb in with him. They lay next to each other, side by side, shoulders touching.

“You don’t like the rain.” Stan repeats, this time yawning.

Bill can feel how cold Stan’s toes are under the blankets. He brushes his friend’s dry curls off to the side of his face. “

“Tha-that’s ruh-right, Stan. I don’t like the ruh-rain.”

When Bill wakes up from his nap an hour later, Stan is gone and so are Bill’s rainboots. *Don’t be expecting to get that back*, Richie’s voice rings in his head

Stanley Uris is going to steal his whole damn wardrobe.

“You need to grow some balls.” Richie says.

There’s ringing and buzzing, along with the classic sound of guns emitting from the arcade machines around them. It smells like stale popcorn and forgotten candy, which reminds Bill of the Aladdin. They should go see a movie this summer. They hadn’t done that in a while.

“Wha-what?” Bill stutters out, taken by surprise.

Stan said he wanted to hang out with him today, really, but Eddie had asked him to go on a top secret mission with him and Mike. Except it wasn’t top secret *He’s totally getting me an anniversary present.* Richie had said.

“You need to have a good ole intervention with Stan the Man.” He says, the sound of the machine he was at making some depressing noises, signalling Richie’s demise. “Like, dude.” He turns to look at Bill, who is leaning against the machine. “I was at his house the other day, right? And I’m snooping. ‘Cause I love that shit, y’know? Getting in other people’s business and-”

“Wuh-was there a po-puh-point to this, R-Rich?”

“Why, of course, Billiam!” Richie slaps him on the shoulder. “He’s collecting your fucking clothes my dude. Like a William Denbrough shrine, except more Stan like. There ain’t no pictures or anything, but

it's there. In the front of his closet.”

“He nuh-needed tho-”

Richie doesn't even wait for him to finish. “I know, I know. You talk to me like I don't listen. All I'm *saying*, ” Richie waggles his eyebrows. “Is that you need to hit him with the sappy shit.”

“Wh-what do yo-you mean?”

“Tell him you love him! The whole shebang! It worked with good ole Eds.”

“Tha-that's not how th-that happened and y-you know it.” Bill says defensively. Everyone knows that is not how it happened. That's because Richie Tozier is a goddamn chicken.

Everyone knows that Eddie does the feelings shit. Everyone knows that it's Richie who made the last move. Richie has the emotional intelligence of a root vegetable. He wouldn't realize his feelings if they hit him over the head with a baseball bat.

“Besides the point. Hit him with the sappy shit, y'know? He's never gonna step up to the plate, but I already know how he swings.” Bill tilts his head at that. What the fuck does that even mean? Before he can even stutter out some phrase that is similar to ‘shut up’, Richie is talking again. “It means that he's gay. At least, for you.”

Stan Uris? Gay? Bill thinks back and nothing really points to it. And it's not that he doesn't like Stan. He loves Stan, he wouldn't care if he's gay. He doesn't care that Richie and Eddie are gay. He just...doesn't know if he's gay. He likes girls, that's been established. Or did he? Bill was good at being in denial, it was the only thing he wasn't in denial about.

"I do-don't kno-know-"

Richie cuts him off again. Bill isn't mad. Richie doesn't have that much of an attention span anymore. "If you like him. You like him. I hate to be the bearer of bad news...No wait, just news. Because everyone knows you guys have the hots for each other." He says matter of factly, sliding more quarters into his game.

"How d-do you know fo-for sure?" Bill wanted to know. He really did. But he wanted to be sure before he did anything...stupid. Or irrational. Especially with Stanley, his most rational friend. Friend. His best friend since as long as he can remember.

"You could kiss him, one smooch to end all other smooches."

Bill sputters. Kiss Stanley? Has Stanley ever even kissed anybody before? Sure, Bill has kissed Bev, but what if it's different from kissing a girl? All of it just seemed too fast, not logical, and a little wild. Like most of Richie's suggestions were.

"Richie!" Eddie's voice is coming from the entrance of the arcade.

It's cute, watching Eddie run over to see what Richie is playing. How his arms wrap around Richie's middle, how he leans on Richie. There's some kind of jealousy pooling in his stomach. Why doesn't he have that?

"Hey, Bill." Stan is there, looking at him with his big doe eyes. He clutching a bag in his right hand, rocking back and forth on his heels. "How's your day with Richie be-"

Bill wishes he had cut him off with words, but instead, he's rushing forwards and pressing his lips against Stan's. It reminds him of his first kiss all over again. Neither of them know what's happening, it takes them both by surprise. It's dry and chapped and god, he feels like he's in junior high again.

Bill pulls back only after a moment and Richie wolf whistles behind him. Stan looks stunned. Stan looks more than stunned. Stan looks...upset?

"I..uh, I have to leave." He drops the bag he was holding and runs out the door, pushing past Mike on his way out into the hot July weather. Stan never runs, not anywhere. Stan never runs away, not when Bill is around.

"That is not what I meant, Billiam." Richie sighs, shoulders slumping.

"I wu-was just listening to what you said."

“That doesn’t mean kiss him in the middle of the arcade!” Eddie is doing that thing where it sounds like a whisper, but he’s actually pissed. God, was Eddie in on this too?

“What did I miss?” And there’s Mike, too damn oblivious for his own good sometimes. He always walked in on the wrong moments.

“I kissed Stan.” Bill said, not stumbling once. Finally owning up to his feelings. Finally doing something about it and it backfired so terribly, so horribly, that Stan will probably never talk to him again. What was he going to do if Stan didn’t talk to him? He couldn’t just...keep going on without Stan. He’s never gone on without Stan.

If we split up, the cl-clown’ll kill us one by one.

If we split up, if we split up, if we split up....They never even got together. And Bill had already ruined it with a poorly timed kiss and no time to give an explanation.

“Well...” Mike said. “He didn’t seem too happy about it.”

No, Bill thought bitterly. No he didn’t.

It's a week later and Bill is sick of being a coward.

He's fifteen, not twelve. He can share some damn feelings. He can solve his own problems. He is not naive enough to think that they'll solve themselves. So he hops on Silver and bikes to Stan's house. Stan's neat and orderly house with his neat and orderly parents and his neat and orderly schedule.

He marches right up to the door like he's brave, which he really isn't. He knows he's not. One false act of bravery and everyone thinks you're a hero, but no you're not. And he knocks. Loudly. It rings through his skull.

Donald Uris opens the door.

Bill is a little intimidated by Donald Uris. He's a lot like Stan, minus all the parts that make Stan warm. The lanky figure, the laughs, the smile, the way that Stan's eyes crinkle when he glares at Richie even makes him seem softer.

"Mr. Denbrough? What'd you need?" He says. Ah, the voice. Much stricter than Stan's too. Not as soothing on the ears.

"I need to speak to Stan." Bill says shortly.

"Bill, I know you two are friends, but he really isn't doing well right now." Oh god, what was wrong with him? Was he having an episode again? Why wasn't Mr. Uris upstairs with him then. "Maybe come

back tomorrow, when his cold is gone.”

The worry seeps out of Bill and he is relieved.

“Muh-Mister Uris, I’ll be fuh-fuh-fine. I just need t-to speak to him quickly.” And get out of the early August heat.

The man sighs and takes a side step, allowing Bill through the open door. He guesses that Mr. Uris would know that Bill would find a way. Bill always manages to find a way, especially when it comes to Stanley.

Bill finds himself taking the stairs by twos to get to Stan’s room. And oh, was Mr. Uris sure this was a cold?

Stan was in his bed, covered in three quilted blankets. Bill was sweating from just looking at him. This is the palest he’s ever seen his friend, almost ghostly. *The ghost the ghost-he insists he sees the ghost.* And the dark circles under his eyes give away how much he’s been sleeping.

“Stuh-Stan?”

“Bill? Is that you?” Stan doesn’t seem to believe that Bill is actually there, standing in front of him.

“Yeah.”

“It’s been a long time.” And no, not to anybody else it has. But Bill agrees. The short time they’ve spent apart has felt like a thousand years. He wouldn’t want to do it again.

“I wo-won’t do it again.” Bill says, going to sit on the edge of Stanley’s precisely made bed. Even when he was tucked into it, the sheets seemed crisp and clean. As if Stan wasn’t really lying in the bed at all.

“I should’ve met you at the quarry on Saturday. I never want you to stop talking to me ever again.” He says like a child making a promise to his best friend, and in a way, they still were. They were still just kids.

“I meant t-th-the kuh-kiss-”

“Bill,” Stan closes his eyes, and god, he looks so small under all of those quilts. And the curls that usually surround his face are matted down in sweat. And it looks like he had just broken some sort of fever, but Bill knows better.

“We do-don’t ha-have to talk about it.” Bill smiles. “Ju-just-”

“No, I liked it.” Stan says, and Bill watches as the other boy’s fingers tighten around the edge of the blanket. “I like it I just didn’t want to tell you because,” He pauses and his eyebrows furrow. “I didn’t want you to think...I didn’t want you to think there’s something wrong with me. Everyone thinks there’s something wrong with me.”

“I do-don’t think that.”

“I know there’s something wrong with me.” Stan says, as if he can’t just accept the fact that anyone could think he’s not sick. Bill looks at him sadly.

“You came to my house. Yo-you came to my ho-house in the rain.” Bill says, laying his hand over the mound of blankets. “And yo-you weren’t wearing shoes.”

Stan’s eyes go wide. “I thought that you would forget, but did...did I he-was I making it worse?”

“I cuh-can’t remember the la-last time I slept when it rained.”

Stan grins at him, a hollow grin, but a grin nonetheless. “Could you...do that again? I know you said you wouldn’t. I know we shouldn’t, but I want you to.”

Bill is a little torn. He really shouldn’t kiss Stan again. It was a bad idea. Not that he didn’t want to, but really, how practical was this whole ordeal?

“I never ask for anything.” Stan tries to sound convincing. “Just. Just please, give me this one thing.”

And Bill is rushing forward much like the first time they kissed. It's all coming back to him. The summer before where he cried at the quarry. How he felt so lonely when Bev left him lying in the dust, and Stan came to the rescue. Stan who can't even save his damn self. He remembers their fingertips touching on the first day of highschool. He remembers Stan wearing his t shirt.

When Bill pulls back, he's grinning. Stan shucks off two of his three blankets. "Yo-You always seem to be a-asking for my cuh-clothes." Bill smiles softly at the other boy. He wants to bring up the scars, he wants to bring up more of what happened on that rainy day. He'll save it for a different time.

"Don't expect to be getting those back anytime soon." Stan smiles back, and it's the first real smile he's seen on the boy's face in forever.

"I plan on sticking around, so don't worry about it." Bill leans forward and presses their forehead together so he can lower his voice to a whisper.

It was a hot August day. They had twenty five more years.

"Don't worry about anything."

Author's Note:

find me @willwheelcr on twitter!